DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 038 561 AA 000 546

AUTHOR	Harrison, Don K.; Brown, Dorothy R.
TITLE	Approaches to Selection and Hiring. Perspectives on Training the Disadvantaged--The Hard-to-Employ. Personnel Services Review Series 2.
INSTITUTION	EPIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
BUREAU NO	BR-6-2487
PUB DATE	May 70
CONTRACT	OEC-3-6-002487-1579-(010)
NOTE	10p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60
DESCRIPTORS	Culturally Disadvantaged, Disadvantaged Youth, *Employment Interviews, *Job Application, *Negro Employment, *Selection, Testing, *Tests

ABSTRACT

Traditional employment screening procedures; the interview, the job application, the high school diploma and work try-outs, may screen out rather than screen in the hard-to-employ. Employment testing may reflect the trainee's anxiety, his cultural differences, the irrelevancy of test questions, and his inability to read rather than his potential capability as a worker. This monograph questions the traditional employment techniques for the hard core and suggests some alternatives. (DB)

ED 038 561

COUNSELING & PERSONNEL SERVICES INFORMATION CENTER

PERSONNEL SERVICES REVIEW

SERIES 2

Perspectives on Training the Disadvantaged — The Hard-to-Employ

APPROACHES TO SELECTION AND HIRING

AA000546

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PERSONNEL SERVICES REVIEW

Series 2
Perspectives on Training the Disadvantaged —
The Hard-to-Employ

Approaches to Selection and Hiring

Don K. Harrison
Dorothy R. Brown

May 1970

ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center
The University of Michigan
611 Church Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan

FORWARD

The Personnel Services Review is an ongoing publication series which has been developed by CAPS to inform personnel workers about new developments in a number of personnel services areas. There will be several different series of the Personnel Services Review. Each series will focus on a broad area of personnel work practice. Within each series there will be a number of specific issues (varying from five to ten depending on the series). Each of these issues will concentrate on a specific practice, procedure or method. The goal of these publications is to enable the reader to: (1) become aware of a practice, procedure or method; (2) learn about the ways in which this practice has been applied by others; (3) understand the underlying theory behind the practice; (4) consider possible applications of the practice in a variety of settings; and (5) consider ways that the practice might be implemented in his own personnel work program.

This particular Personnel Services Review series is entitled, "Perspectives on Training the Disadvantaged--The 'Hard-to-Employ'". Each issue will focus on an activity which has direct relevance for hiring, training, and retaining new workers from a disadvantaged background. The series is intended for use by personnel specialists and training staff in industry and business who wish to learn more about the development of their industrial work force. This series may also be of interest to vocational educators, employment counselors and specialists in the field of vocational education.

APPROACHES TO SELECTION AND HIRING

RELEVANCE TO YOU

Do you know that traditional selection procedures will often tend to "screen out" potentially good workers from a disadvantaged background?

Are you aware that traditional employment tests do not adequately identify the talent of potential employees who have lived under disadvantaging circumstances?

Are you familiar with modified approaches that are being used to identify capable employees among the potential new work force?

Attaining the objectives of management depends in large measure on having productive workers. The selection of individuals from a disadvantaged population who are likely to be able to meet production goals and standards is of significant concern to the personnel involved in the selection process.

WHAT IS MEANT BY SELECTION FOR EMPLOYMENT?

Simply put, selection refers to whatever procedures are introduced by those in charge of hiring, in order to make a determination about who should be hired and who should be rejected for employment. Some personnel specialists may rely more or less on one or several criteria. Criteria used in the selection process may include the following: an interview; the job application; testing; and work try-outs.

APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

Traditional personnel screening procedures will generally screen out individuals referred to as hard core unemployed even through the objective is to "screen in" individuals with skills and potentially good employees. Let us examine some of the generally used procedures and explore their usefulness, i.e., use of tests; the interview; school achievement; the application; and work try-outs.

A. The Use of Tests

The use of tests in the normal selection process has been the subject of considerable discussion, particularly as a measure of predicting who will be effective workers. Are tests a good way to select future workers who have lived under disadvantaged conditions? Do tests really measure, or are they used as a habit? Do the tests measure the knowledge a person has, or his ability to learn a craft?

In using tests with workers from disadvantaged backgrounds, some of the considerations should be:

1. The anxiety or worry of taking tests.
2. Cultural bias of tests—things that we use (like toothbrushes), and ways that we think.
3. The relevance of content (what does the capital of Afghanistan have to do with being a good machine operator?).
4. The representation of the disadvantaged in the norm group. The author of the test probably stressed middle-class objects and ideas (if

you never use a saucer [and some groups do not] you would not know the relationship between the cup and saucer.)

The following sections discuss these considerations in more detail:

1. Test Anxiety
   There may have been little exposure to tests, either formally in school or informally in the home. If they have taken tests in a job-getting experience, they usually were screened out because their scores were not high enough. A certain amount of suspicion, apprehension, and fear has developed, particularly among the black minority, since tests have often been linked with rejection. Tests are likely to be anxiety-producing so that efficiency is impaired. The person's motivation may be low because he has predisposed fears of rejection.

2. Cultural Bias of Tests
   Many tests tend to reflect the background of the middle-class majority. Since the applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds have not shared fully in the "mainstream of the majority", their exposures have been different. Review the following questions and indicate your answer.
   1) "T-Bone Walker" got famous for playing a
      a. trombone
      b. piano
      c. "T-flute"
      d. guitar
      e. hambone

   2) A "Gas Head" is a person who has a
      a. fast moving car
      b. stable of "lace"
      c. "process"
      d. habit of stealing cars
      e. long jail record for arson

   3) If a man is called a "Blood", then he is a
      a. boxer
      b. Mexican-American
      c. Negro
      d. hungry hemophile
      e. redman or Indian

   4) "Bird" or "Yardbird" was the "jacket" that jazz lovers from coast to coast hung on
      a. Lester Young
      b. Dorothy Armstrong
      c. Billy "the Lion" Smith
      d. Charlie Parker
      e. Mugsy Spanier

   5) Cheap chitlings (not the kind you buy at a frozen-food counter) will taste rubbery unless they are cooked long enough. How soon can you quit cooking them to eat and enjoy them?
      a. 45 minutes
      b. 2 hours
      c. 24 hours
      d. 1 week (on a low flame)
      e. 1 hour

   6) Who did "Stagger Lee" kill (in the famous blues legend)?
      a. His cousin
      b. Frankie
      c. Johnny
      d. His girlfriend
      e. Billy

   (Answers on the last page.)

   <u>If this were the basis of your selection for employment, would you have been rejected?</u>

   One of the assumptions of tests is that each individual has had the opportunity to be exposed to similar kinds of experiences, and that tests will indicate the extent to which the individual has assimilated such experiences. Traditionally-used tests thus probably tend to indicate what the hard-core unemployed have <u>not</u> been exposed to. The use of tests with such groups will not predict the individual's potential capability as a worker.

3. Norm Group Distribution
   Many tests have not included members of minorities in the norm, or average group. Future work behavior of the hard core unemployed may not be accurately predicted. The tests tend to predict national norms rather than conditions of the local work force.

4. Relevancy of Content
   It is not uncommon for the applicant to think, for example, "<u>What do the items on this test have to do with whether or not I can work as a welder</u>?" When individuals feel that the test makes no sense, they are not very likely to be motivated to do their best. They may see this as another stumbling block that is being put in front of them by "the man". (He will use this test as an excuse to not hire!) Many of the tests now used stress the skills of working with <u>ideas and symbols</u>. Many possible jobs for the hard-to-employ require working with <u>things</u>.

   At Honeywell Corporation, effort is

made to identify the future employee's positive characteristics. Some questions might be the following:

What have you done best in work and in non-work situations?

What kinds of things have you done?

What are you interested in?

What kinds of things do you do better than other things?

No moral implications are attached to the answers. The skills needed to make a good numbers man may also qualify a person for a legitimate job. Some personnel workers may say, "Either design a new general employment test or let's forget the use of tests completely." Such a new test, under design by Psychological Corporation, will attempt to reduce anxiety about being tested and prepare a prospective job applicant to do his best on tests he may encounter in seeking employment. A tape recording guides the group in half an hour through a variety of easy test-like exercises in a twenty page booklet. A second twenty-page booklet with similar material is then provided for the prospective candidate to take home for practice at his leisure.

Some feel that tests, if used at all, should simply locate the potential employee where he is right now.

B. Applications and Interviews

Several companies have abandoned tests as a basis for selection and hiring. Instead, the interview may provide the business or company with much needed information about the applicant. Participants may need to meet together several times until rapport has been established between the interviewer and the subject. The attitude of job applicant (he may be hostile toward an authority figure) toward the interviewer, and the attitude of interviewer are crucial.

International Harvester's typical interview plan might ask, "Does he want a job? Has he demonstrated regular attendance anywhere? Has he a workable plan for getting to and from work? Are members of his family employed? Does he drink? Is he bitter or hostile toward others? Can he read tickets, signs, etc.?"

The interview may be accompanied by a check of:

a. previous employers
b. references supplied by job applicant
c. police

However, some caution is warranted or the personnel specialist may 'screen-out' a substantial number of applicants.

Some employers become disillusioned with new recruits when a check of references reveals falsehood and failure to mention negative factors. All of us want to look good on an application so we may not include all relevant facts, or even know what they are. This is no less true for the urban unemployed. A young man gives a non-existent address as his residence, or he may give an address where no one knows him. Another young man in his twenties reports no police record. On checking, it is learned that he was in prison for several years on an armed robbery charge. Why would he lie? It was very carefully explained to him that his police record would not serve as a basis for no-hire. The applicant may have had good reason to not trust the system. In the past he has been assured that his record will not make any difference, but he has found that it does. Some companies use the references merely for background information, not a real basis for hire or not to hire.

C. School Achievement

The high school diploma is still widely used as a criteria for employment selection. The quality of this degree varies greatly. Sometimes it means twelve years of actual achievement but very often it does not. In some they have kids going to the high school, reading at the fourth and fifth grade level—when they get a twelfth grade diploma, what level are they reading at now?

Again, road blocks can be placed in the path of the new recruit if an arbitrary grade-level completion is set. Certain tests like the Army Beta would let you know exactly the grade reading level of the recruit; the grade completed might not mean anything.

D. Work Try-Out

Work try-outs give the worker a chance to perform sample operations of a job to determine his proficiency. This

approach makes more sense to the urban unemployed than a battery of tests would. Factors to be considered include the previous experiences of the workers with similar jobs and working conditions, the complexity of tasks to be performed if the worker is a beginner, the applicant's interest in the job offered, etc. The noisy, chaotic, and sometimes hostile environment of some factories may confuse and dismay the new recruit. A totally new working environment for the applicant may reduce his efficiency to the extent that he cannot immediately demonstrate what he can do. Observing his social adjustment through a period of actual work practice may furnish useful information.

GENERALIZATIONS

1. The urban unemployed represent a vast source of manpower supply that is available to employers to meet management goals of productivity and profitability. New methods of selection are required in order to identify talent among this group of potential workers.

2. Although companies may use one or several combined approaches in the selection and hiring process, (e.g., testing, interview and application, and level of school attainment) these approaches need to be examined for strengths and weaknesses for use in determining who to hire from among the hard-to-employ.

3. Standardized employment tests tend to discriminate against minority groups because of the cultural biases reflected in the test content.

4. While there are individual differences represented in the hard-to-employ population, applicants may tend to hide past experiences which they feel are negative in the eyes of the majority.

ACTION POSSIBILITIES

1. A review of selection procedures will help determine whether workers from disadvantaged backgrounds are being rejected, even though they may be capable of performing some of the jobs in your plants.

2. If your company does not give new applicants a chance to try out on-the-job, you may wish to consider this as a method for determining who has the required skills to perform.

3. For potential employees who are lacking in certain basic education, you may consider enrolling these individuals in job-related basic education programs.

IMPLEMENTATION

Examine a company hiring program with these questions:

1. Do I want to retain my present testing program? If I change the program, should it be for all new employees or just hard-to-employ?

2. Do I have competent personnel to carry out this program or should I go to special consultants from the State Employment Agency or private agencies, or professional organizations like the American Psychological Association?

3. Instead of tests, would a lengthy interview be better? Do I have anyone who is skilled at interviewing and will be able to relate to a seventeen-year-old Negro ghetto youth? Can I use the special recruiter or someone like him?

4. Perhaps I can call on community organizations (in recruitment issue) for help again?

Here are the answers to the Employment Test.

1. d
2. c
3. c
4. d
5. c
6. d

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